

Working To Save Lives



31 May 2013

Mr. Alan Shatter, T.D.
Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence
94 St. Stephen's Green
Dublin 2

Dear Minister Shatter

I write on behalf of the Board of the Road Safety Authority to highlight our concerns about the deterioration in the death and injuries rates on Irish roads in 2013. We are concerned about an apparent reduction in the volume of high visibility roads policing and are writing to seek your personal intervention to ensure that roads policing levels are reinstated as a matter of urgency. In the absence of high visibility, high volume roads policing road user behaviour will continue to deteriorate and will result in further loss of life and serious injuries. The Board appreciate the financial constraints within which An Garda Síochána must operate, however, there is a strong economic argument to support investment in roads policing. The cost to the Exchequer per fatality is €2.2m and we are now in a situation where a return to 300 plus fatalities per annum is a real risk. Enforcement levels have deteriorated markedly year on year since 2008 and levels for first four months of 2013 are of significant concern to the Authority. In that context I would ask for your immediate intervention to restate from your position of leadership the importance of roads policing and the levels of activity which you expect. It would be helpful if Government could reinstate the post of full time Assistant Commissioner to lead roads policing nationally. Such a post should be accompanied by a clear statement from you on the levels of enforcement you require and these should be robustly monitored.

The Board are alarmed at the manner in which some Courts appear to deal with road traffic matters. Large numbers of drivers are still not required to produce their driving licence in Court despite the Óireachtas passing legislation requiring Courts to do so. It is a specific offence not to produce a licence in Court and we ask that, as Minister, you intervene with the Court Service to ensure that licences are produced and in instances where they are not produced that An Garda Síochána are provided with information to allow them to follow up with those motorists. Fixed charge notices are a proven deterrent and are a very cost effective way of dealing with the enforcement of road traffic legislation with reduced costs for An Garda Síochána and for the Court Service. We would encourage you to work with your colleagues in Cabinet to ensure that as many offences as possible are moved out of Courts and moved into a fixed charge notice system. Coupled with penalty points this is proven to be a most effective way of enhancing road user behaviour and ultimately reducing the number

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of motorist who are prosecuted. I would be grateful if you could give these matters your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Gay Byrne,
Chairman.

cc: Mr. Leo Varadkar, T.D., Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.



AN ROINN DLÍ AGUS CIRT AGUS COMHIONANNAIS
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE & EQUALITY

Gay Byrne
Chairman
Road Safety Authority
Moy Valley Business Park
Primrose Hill
Dublin Road
Ballina
Co Mayo

*Noted & file
13/6/13*

Road Safety Authority
12 JUN 2013

Minister Reference: 0610114847

10 June, 2013

Dear Mr Byrne,

I write to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 31 May, 2013.

Yours sincerely,

Private Secretary
to the Minister for Justice & Equality



OIFIG AN AIRE DLÍ AGUS CIRT AGUS COMHIONANNAIS
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE & EQUALITY

Mr. Gay Byrne
Chairman
Road Safety Authority
Moy Valley Business Park
Primrose Hill
Dublin Road
Ballina
Co. Mayo

Minister Reference: 0610114847

Dear Mr Byrne

Thank you for your letter of 31 May concerning road safety issues.

I had put off replying because at around the same time Minister Varadkar was in touch with me asking that I meet with him and the Road Safety Authority to discuss certain matters. Subsequently, I, together with my officials, had a very useful meeting with Minister Varadkar and Noel Brett. I expect you may have been briefed by now on the outcome but, in any event, we discussed a range of road safety matters, including questions raised in your letter concerning the operation of the penalty points system. We agreed clear actions for moving these matters forward and, for my part, I will do everything I can to ensure progress on these matters.

I know, both from your letter and public comments reported to have been made by you, of your concerns about the level of enforcement by An Garda Síochána. While I appreciate your frustration in this regard, I think it would be a serious mistake to allow an entirely false impression to be created that either the Government or An Garda Síochána are not continuing to prioritise road traffic enforcement or not continuing to devote considerable resources to this area. It is perfectly understandable to seek more resources for this area, but, in making that case, it is important that we do not convey the erroneous and hazardous impression that the level of Garda enforcement is such that people can now take chances with road safety when the reality is that enforcement remains high and determined.

Deployment of Garda resources is, of course, a matter for the Garda Commissioner. However, in deploying resources, the Garda Commissioner has to have regard to the policing priorities which I as Minister must, by law, set. Those priorities, as determined by me, include this year an emphasis on continuing to reduce the number of deaths and injuries on our roads and I know, aside from the fact that this is included as a policing priority, that this objective in any case is strongly shared by the Garda Commissioner.

Indeed, I know that you would be the first to give credit to the role which An Garda Síochána played, along with other agencies and the public themselves, in seeing road deaths drop to a historic low last year, making Ireland the 5th safest country for road users in the EU. Of course, I share your concern, and that of the Board's, at the increase in the number of fatalities so far this year and want to assure you of my commitment - and that of the agencies for which I am responsible - in responding to this, as part of the Government's overall Road Safety Strategy.

I, of course, acknowledge fully that, in common with all public sector organisation, An Garda Síochána must operate within the financial realities which we face as a nation. Within those unavoidable constraints I have tried to secure as high a level of resources for An Garda Síochána as possible and, indeed, I was able to announce recently that I had received approval to begin the process of resuming recruitment to An Garda Síochána. I am sure, though, you will appreciate that the current financial environment will remain challenging.

I believe, however, that the Garda Commissioner is responding to this challenge in a strategic and targeted fashion to ensure optimum use is made of the substantial resources which remain available to him, including in field of road safety. Enforcement of road traffic law by the Garda authorities continues to focus on high risk behaviour and on identified vulnerable road users with a view to reducing the number of serious injury collisions and fatalities on our roads.

Concrete, measurable indicators of enforcement, such as the number of Mandatory Alcohol Checkpoints (MATs) carried out, show that the level of enforcement remains high. In fact the number of MATs increased between 2011 and 2012 and is slightly up again in 2013. Drink driving arrests in 2012 were down for the fifth year in a row, even though there were more MAT checkpoints in 2012 compared to 2011. The rate of detection was approximately 1 in 25 in 2007, whereas now it is approximately 1 in 50, which is considered to reflect increased compliance in what is a key risk factor for road safety.

The Gardai also now have the benefit of the road safety camera network which has had a measurable impact on speed compliance since its introduction and which has freed up Garda resources for other traffic enforcement. Building on the success of this initiative, additional targeted safety zones have been introduced by An Garda Síochána earlier this year, based on recent collision and other relevant data.

An Garda Síochána also continue to conduct specific targeted initiatives, such as Operation Slowdown and related high visibility speed enforcement activity which took place on both national primary and secondary roads over the June bank holiday weekend. Another recent initiative was 'Fatal Friday', a targeted appeal from the Garda Authorities to the broadcast media to highlight the need for greater care when travelling on our roads on Friday, and a further particular appeal has recently been aimed at reducing motorcycle user fatalities. I mention these as just some examples of the excellent work which An Garda Síochána have underway in relation to road safety.

While I appreciate the dangers of remarks being taken out of context, I noted that in some of the reported comments attributed to you that you appeared to be calling into question my personal commitment to road safety. In the context of the historically low level of road deaths in 2012, the funding which I secured in 2012 and 2013 for the purchase of additional Garda vehicles (€9m.) and the priority which I ensured was given to road safety in the Policing Plans for 2012 and 2013, I might be forgiven for finding your reported comments puzzling. Despite requests to do so, I declined to comment publicly in any detail on those reports. I took the view that the cause of keeping people safe on our roads is not advanced in any way by public personal denigration among those who have onerous responsibilities to

discharge in this regard. I am sure you will agree that the job which we all share of keeping people safe from death or injury on the roads is far too serious for that.

Finally, I would like to join with yourself and others in acknowledging Noel Brett's contribution to road safety in recent years. In particular, I greatly appreciate the trouble which Noel took to participate in a conference which I organised in Israel last March on the topic of road safety where the Road Safety Authority and Garda Síochána together with their counterparts in Israel shared and learned from each others' experiences. Indeed, I understand that those contacts are still continuing and proving of benefit to the administrations in both jurisdictions in their work in making roads safer. It was also a particular pleasure last January as part of our Presidency of the European Union to participate with Noel and others at a conference of TISPOL - the European Traffic Police Network. The discussions which we participated in were very useful and the President of TISPOL was gracious enough to comment very favourably on the progress which had been made in Ireland on road safety. While Noel's departure will undoubtedly be a loss, I wish him very well in moving on to a new job.

I have no doubt that we can continue to build on the work of all of the agencies involved - nationally and internationally - towards further improvements in road safety.

Yours sincerely



Alan Shatter, TD
MINISTER FOR JUSTICE,
EQUALITY AND DEFENCE

23/12/2003